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The War of the Truce in Saigon

By FOX BUTTERFIELD

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Nov. 15—South Vietnam, while still trying to press Hanoi and Washington for more favorable peace terms, is quietly preparing to accept a peace settlement when it is finally worked out.

This is the view of many informed Vietnamese and American officials here who have been bewildered and bemused by the continuing spate of contradictory speeches, statements and leaks to the press coming out of President Nguyen Van Thieu's palace ever since Henry A. Kissinger visited Saigon over three weeks ago.

The strongest indication that Saigon would, in fact, accept the nine-point draft accord came yesterday in secret testimony by Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "The Foreign Minister left us with the clear impression that South Vietnam will have to accept the settlement some time soon," said one Senator who attended the closed-door session.

"From what he said," the Senator continued, "it seemed that most of Mr. Thieu's objections to the nine-point accord have already been cleared up." The key remaining issue, the Senator reported Mr. Lam as having said, was the need to get some firm understanding on the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam.

Most American officials appear to share this view. "It's pretty well nailed down now," said one usually reliable source, "though it may take a little more negotiating to get everyone to sign."

Haig Expected Back

It is widely expected in Saigon that Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., President Nixon's deputy adviser on national security, will make at least one more visit to Saigon, probably next week, to inform Mr. Thieu about the outcome of the latest round of secret talks in Paris.

As part of the continuing negotiations, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker talked with President Thieu in the palace today for 17 minutes, an unusually short time for a such a meeting. It suggested that Mr. Bunker had merely delivered a note from Washington and had not discussed the disputed terms of the accord.

Separate Talks Suggested

In contrast with these reports of progress toward get-

Thieu Seen Battling for All He Can Get Before Yielding

South Vietnam will agree to the accord and has persisted in offering new proposals of its own.

Today, for example, the quasiofficial newspaper Tin Song reported that Mr. Thieu's chief aide, Hoang Duc Nha, had proposed that instead of the present nine-point draft accord there be three brand new sets of negotiations to work out a different settlement.

This proposal, which was originally offered and rejected in 1969, would involve separate negotiations, first between South Vietnam, the United States, North Vietnam and the Vietcong; second between North Vietnam and South Vietnam, and third South Vietnam and the Vietcong. Each set of negotiations would have a different agenda.

In addition, Tin Song, which is often used to voice the views of Mr. Nha and Mr. Thieu, said that it had been reliably stated that South Vietnam would never accept the draft accord unless it provided for the total withdrawal of all North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam. Tin Song estimated, as President Thieu also has, that there are 300,000 North Vietnamese troops in the South. That would be at least 100,000 more troops than American intelligence officers believe North Vietnam has in the South.

Series of Counterproposals

Mr. Nha's proposal for three separate sets of negotiations is just the latest in a series of Saigon counterproposals, each seemingly contradicting the previous one. On Oct. 27, for example, Mr. Thieu himself outlined an offer that called for a referendum supervised by the United Nations to carry out elections in the South instead of the proposed National Council of Reconciliation and Concord.

Yesterday, Foreign Minister Lam told newsmen that he

hoped South Vietnam could have a representative sit in on the secret negotiations in Paris between Mr. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, the North Vietnamese delegate. Mr. Lam said he thought it should be South Vietnam's delegate to the regular Paris peace talks, Pham Dang Lam, but sources in the presidential palace said that Mr. Nha himself wanted to attend.

This variety of proposals and positions has led many diplomats here to conclude that the Thieu Government is simply trying to stall and to wrest a few extra concessions out of Washington.

More cynical South Vietnamese believe that the plethora of statements only reflects the Government's lack of a real policy. "Thieu just doesn't have a fixed position on peace, what he wants and what he thinks he can get," said one opposition politician today. "So the Government flounders around and announces something new every day."